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AN EXCURSUS ON AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION
Łukasz Bogucki talks to Jorge Díaz-Cintas

ŁB: You have been actively involved in research into audiovisual translation (AVT) for well over twenty years and are now widely considered one of the main researchers in the field. When you started out in the early 1990s, AVT was hailed as a new, dynamic, and interdisciplinary research field. Was this always the case?

The most obvious change that we have observed in the last three decades or so is the progressive shifting of AVT from the margins to the centre of the academic debate, in a rather rapid fashion and after somewhat sluggish beginnings. Although nobody doubts these days that AVT is part and parcel of the translation ecosystem, for many years it was snubbed by scholars more interested in literary artefacts and comparative literature, who thus considered AVT to be a case of adaptation and unworthy of serious academic attention. In essence, of course, practices like subtitling and dubbing are used to transfer a message in a source language into another message in a target language, which falls squarely under the traditional criterion for translation to be considered as such, i.e. the conversion of languages in an attempt to help people comprehend messages in idioms that they do not understand. From this perspective, AVT is not ontologically different from the translation of poetry, fiction, the Bible or the Quran, though it clearly adds a level of complexity that derives from its multimedia nature and whose investigation requires an interdisciplinary approach, including a good knowledge of the role played by technology. This is perhaps one of the reasons why interest in its study was lukewarm for so many years, for it was difficult to find the right probing angle and even to source the right material, such as dubbed/subtitled copies of films, dialogue lists, working documents with the duration of the subtitles and the like.

Establishing the remit of our field has also proved challenging as there seemed to exist many professional realities that could be considered as belonging to AVT, which then run the risk of diluting its essence: audiovisual productions, live performances, video games, accessibility services, websites, comics. In this sense, it is evident that we have had to push the boundaries of notions like 'translation (proper)' to make it more accommodating of new practices and ways of communicating. This is the reason why we also struggled to find the appropriate nomenclature and resorted to terms like cinema translation, film translation, constrained translation, film and TV translation, screen translation, multimedia translation and multidimensional translation, among others, before we finally settled for audiovisual translation, abbreviated as AVT, which is the most common concept being used currently in English and in many other languages.

Nowadays, the discussion among some academics revolves around whether we can consider ourselves a proper 'discipline' or a 'sub-discipline' within the wider area of 'translation studies', which I guess makes more sense, even though some would still query the conception of translation as a proper 'discipline' and persist in including it within more established domains like 'applied linguistics' or even 'comparative literature'. On the flip side of the coin, and counter to these centripetal, agglutinating forces, some investigators prefer to adopt a centrifugal approach and advocate the distinctiveness and academic independence of

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research fields like 'accessibility studies' or 'video games studies'. To my mind, discussions of this epistemological nature have limited resonance in the wider academic world and, given the necessary interdisciplinary nature of our research, I personally would prioritise a more general, encapsulating conceptualisation of AVT.

What cannot be disputed, however, is the fact that in recent decades AVT has developed very fast, with great impetus and, from a polysystem theory viewpoint, it can be said to be shifting from the periphery to the centre, thus becoming a more dominant, driving notion within translation studies.

ŁB: What is so distinct about the translation of audiovisual texts?

Although they may look simple because of our repeated exposure to them, audiovisual texts are very complex semiotic composites in which a variety of codes coalesce in order to create meaning. Their multimodal nature is as arresting as it is challenging. Sounds, images, speech, written text and music, they all contribute their part to the final message and the challenge from the translator's perspective is that, more often than not, only the verbal input can be transformed from a source into a target language. The rest is supposed to travel across cultures frictionless, which is clearly a problematic assumption. Manipulation of the image is less common, though not infrequent depending on the country, and tends to be the response to censorial pressures, which of course can also happen with the verbal exchanges. In this sense, we are still very far from the sort of transcreative practices that can be seen in the localisation of video games, where the internationalisation of the product is considered from an early stage and embedded into the workflow. In the media entertainment industry, translation continues to be almost an afterthought and always part of the postproduction services, which makes the recomposition of any images very difficult, if not financially unmanageable.

The other point that I would like to raise is that although we too often fell in the trap of debating AVT as if it were a single, homogeneous and unifying activity, the reality is that it is made up of a myriad of practices that can be very different from each other, both technically and linguistically: dubbing, subtitling, respeaking, audio description… And this also contributes to the quirkiness of our field.

ŁB: Traditionally, nations have been divided into dubbing or subtitling countries. What are the reasons behind this dichotomy?

The dubbing versus subtitling debate has been a recurrent, hackneyed topic in the AVT literature pretty much since its origins. In Europe, countries where the FIGS languages – i.e. French, Italian, German and Spanish – are spoken, along with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, have traditionally preferred dubbing, while Poland, Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic States are well known for their voiceover practices. Subtitling is favoured in the remaining countries. As for the rest of the world, and to my knowledge, no studies have ventured into the delineation of a map with national borders demarcated according to the countries'

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audiovisual antics, though, roughly speaking, dubbing has been coveted in nations with large populations like Brazil, China, India, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines and Turkey.

The reasons behind this situation are of course multifarious. Traditionally, dubbing has been nurtured by authoritarian regimes as viewers are not granted access to the original dialogue soundtrack and censorship strategies can then be activated in a sibylline way. Illiteracy levels have also been a resolute factor in this equation and countries with lesser educated populations have tended to go for dubbing. Similarly, children's programmes are also dubbed in all countries so that those still learning to read can enjoy the productions. For some, this practice is also better suited at recreating cinematic illusion and luring the audience to believe that the characters on screen are also native speakers of their language. In this time and age, a crucial distinction resides in the fact that dubbed audio is more easily processed than subtitles when trying to multitask. On the other hand, subtitling being much cheaper and faster than dubbing has had a decisive impact on those taking commercial decisions, while people who want to experience foreign content authentically prefer subtitles, perhaps even to hone their foreign language skills in the process.

Comfortable as they may be, drawing these sharp lines between dubbing and subtitling parts of the world is certainly misleading and the reality is that the situation was not, and is not, as clear cut as it may sound.

ŁB: How are things changing, then?

I am not sold on the idea floated by authors like Luyken et al. (1991) that the preference for one mode or another is down to habit and that viewers favour the AVT mode to which they are most used. Tradition might somewhat influence preferences, but it is certainly not the only factor. As highlighted by the Media Consulting Group (2011: 10) in their report on the use of subtitling in Europe, a correlation seems to exist between age and number of languages spoken, as "the younger the respondents (aged 12–18 and 18–25) and the more languages they speak, the more pronounced is their preference for subtitling over dubbing".

Then, consumption varies even within the same country. In Poland, for instance, people would watch the same foreign film voiced-over on television but subtitled in the cinema. In many countries, public service broadcasters would resort to dubbing while private TV stations activate subtitling as their main translation strategy, and social media networks have made of subtitling the main tool of globalisation all over the world.

In 'subtitling' countries like Greece, TV soap operas from Latin America and Turkey are dubbed and in Portugal and Japan an increasing number of programmes are also being broadcast in their dubbed version. Conversely, in 'dubbing' countries like Spain, Italy and China, for instance, many youngsters prefer to watch the subtitled versions so that they can improve their command of foreign languages, principally English.

A most telling experiment on viewers habits was the one carried out by Netflix in 2018 (Nguyen 2018). When interviewed, consumers overwhelmingly told the company that they

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wanted to watch foreign originals with English subtitles. Yet, Netflix decided to stream a dubbed version of the French show *Marseille* only to discover that those who got the dubbed streams were more likely to finish the series than those who watched it with subtitles. Consequently, Netflix now set the majority of their foreign shows to English dubbed by default, while still letting users switch to the original with subtitles, if so they wish.

The debate of whether dubbing is better than subtitling, or vice-versa, has become obsolete and is simply not pertinent any longer. Academic approaches have now moved well beyond value-laden comparisons between these two modes to put their emphasis in understanding them as equally deserving translational practices, in a booming audiovisual industry. In my opinion, the keyword in this debate is 'choice'. Since the arrival of the DVD in the mid-1990s, and more recently with the landing of the so-called OTT (over-the-top) media providers, the way in which viewers can consume audiovisual programmes has been revolutionised and more and more the expectation is that any given programme will be made available accompanied by various sound and subtitle tracks in different languages as well as access services like SDH and AD so that individuals, who are now in the driving seat, can choose how to watch them.

ŁB: From a general perspective, how has the visibility of AVT evolved in the last couple of decades?

One of the most significant changes is that audiovisual translation has expanded its horizons well beyond the translation of feature films and fictional programmes and it now encompasses countless different genres, such as documentaries, corporate videos, sports programmes, news, educational videos, cookery programmes, musical video clips, political broadcasts and many others, which in turn has resulted in an unprecedented growth in digital video consumption around the globe. According to some statistics, audiovisual content on the net makes up a staggering 80% of all the internet traffic in the world (Lister 2019). Communication in the 21st century has become multimodal and multimedia, making the most of sound and image. The advent of video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime, and their interest in providing a global service, have added to the equation, leading translation activity in our field to an all-time high. If subtitling has traditionally been perceived as globalisation's preferred translation tool, dubbing and voiceover are these days experiencing an unprecedented boom propitiated by the OTT media services (Bylykbashi 2019). Never before has AVT been so prominent and visible on our screens.

Beyond the commercial dimension, amateur activities and internet-bred concepts such as fansubbing/fandubbing, cybersubtitling/cyberdubbing, as well as the creation of user-generated material are daily occurrences. This is possible thanks to faster broadband capability, greater connectivity, peer-to-peer computing, the democratisation of technology and the ready availability of video editing suites, subtitling freeware and cloud-based platforms, audio recording applications and the like. Initiatives like TED, with their global community of volunteers in charge of subtitling their TED Talks, have inspired many other media ventures on the net, like Khan Academy or Coursera. Also, the phenomenon of the

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YouTubers greatly relies on their visibility on the world wide web and the arresting nature of their audiovisual output. Many of them command millions of followers and, although they continue to be relatively monolingual, some are now expanding their offer into other languages by subtitling and revoicing their videos. This is a rather new development of which I expect to see more in the coming years.

Access services is another area that has grown exponentially in terms of volume of activity as well as social and legal visibility. Many countries have passed legislation that compels broadcasters to distribute a minimum percentage of their audiovisual productions with subtitles for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH), audio description for the blind and the visually impaired (AD) and Sign Language Interpreting (SLI). The accessometer created as part of the Media Accessibility Platform project (https://mapaccess.uab.cat/accessometer) is a useful tool to have a glimpse of how different nations around the globe fare on this front. Though at present regulations only apply to traditional TV channels, media regulators in some countries are being given new powers to force on-demand broadcasters and streaming services to follow suit (Wilkinson-Jones, 2017). And while production and turnover keep raising, new practices are also being developed, like interlingual live respeaking.

ŁB: What do you think the role of technology has been in this AVT boom?

It has been clearly pivotal. The development of specialist technology in our field is the other front that has seen a massive evolution in the last two or three decades, not only in terms of distribution and exhibition but also production. The digital switchover at the turn of the last century marked the demise of the VHS tape and the arrival of the DVD, with all its capacity and potential for the storage and distribution of audiovisual productions. By now, the DVD has virtually disappeared, the Blu-ray format has not really taken off and the centre stage is now occupied by the OTT operators and their streaming programmes as well as by the social media networks.

When it comes to the production stages, AVT has been at the mercy of the twists and turns of technology and it is thanks to the instrumental role played by technology that subtitles can today be successfully produced live with minimal latency, that subtitlers can work in cloud-based environments, usually from the comfort of their own home, and that their productivity has been enhanced thanks to the development of user-friendly software that enables professionals to work at a faster pace than before. Commercial subtitling programs that were unrivalled until the early noughties – Wincaps, Swift, Fab, Spot, EZtitles – face now the fierce competition of free, easy-to-use subtitling editors such as Aegisub, Subtitle Edit and Subtitle Workshop, to the extent that in order to counter these challenges operational models have changed and a transition has taken place in the industry from capital expenditure (CAPEX), i.e. investing in the purchase of tools, to operating expenditure (OPEX), whereby users rent a piece of software on a pay as you go basis.

Research on the way in which technology is used in AVT (Díaz-Cintas and Massidda 2019) and on its potential to automatise processes and outputs, such as machine translation applied to subtitling (Bywood et al. 2017), is becoming more popular and mainstream in our field. While

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desktop subtitling programs are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future, new opportunities are being developed around a global pool of localisation teams connected to (usually proprietary) cloud-based platforms, with the ultimate goal of improving speed, efficiency, security and scalability. Cloud-based subtitling and captioning platforms, like Ooona or ZOO, are browser-based systems that translators can access from any device connected to the internet to carry out spotting, translation, reviewing and other post-production tasks from any part of the world, without having to download any programs or applications (see Bolaños-García-Escribano and Díaz-Cintas in this volume).

Other exciting advances taking place in our field are related to automatic speech recognition (ASR), with great potential for human-independent dialogue transcription tasks as well as respeaking, both intralingual and interlingual. Some companies, such as ZOO and VoiceQ, are taking these developments further, with the design of cloud-based platforms focused on dubbing and revoicing, in what some people see as the next big disruptive cycle in the industry. In view of these developments, as argued by O'Hagan (2016), one of the main challenges faced by translation scholars is to be able to find an appropriate theoretical framework that would allow a critical examination of the significant role that technology has on translation output; a task that is proving surprisingly elusive in our discipline.

ŁB: Can you elaborate further on the potential of CAT tools and automation in our field?

Of course, we cannot forget the advances taking place not only in machine translation (MT) but also in translation memory (TM) tools that are clearly targeting the various fields of AVT, particularly subtitling. In addition to the more recent ASR systems that I have just mentioned, research projects have been carried out since the early 2000s on the development of MT engines for interlingual subtitling. An example was the European-funded initiative SUMAT (Subtitling by Machine Translation), which employed cloud-based statistical machine translation (SMT) engines to automatically translate subtitles in seven bi-directional language combinations and proposed the training of post-editors in the field of subtitling in an attempt to optimise the ensuing quality.

From a more practical perspective, YouTube's accessibility services started back in 2008 with the development of an auto-captioning component, based on Google's Voice Search, to add intralingual subtitles to their audiovisual content for the benefit of the deaf and the hard-of-hearing audiences. A few years later, they went interlingual and started to provide an auto-translate feature, powered by Google Translate, which allows viewers to translate subtitles by simply clicking on the CC button that appears on screen and selecting the language of their choice from a list. Though vastly improved since its inception, quality continues to be wanting in these environments.

Paradoxically, the usefulness of CAT tools for the translation of audiovisual productions is still relatively underexplored, though developers like memoQ, Wordbee, and more recently SDL Trados, have started to adapt their TM systems for subtitling, providing video in context via a built-in media player, whilst at the same time granting translators access to their TM resources for subtitling. In our field, the use of TMs and glossaries, especially for the translation of

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specific audiovisual genres such as corporate videos, technical and scientific documentaries and any audiovisual text with a high percentage of linguistic repetition, could easily speed up the subtitling process in a substantive way. In the case of other genres, such as TV series made up of numerous seasons, CAT tools could help strengthen cohesion across episodes when dealing with idiosyncratic expressions, taboo words, or proper names of people and places that are often repeated.

Last, but not least, we cannot forget that the multimodal nature of audiovisual productions opens a vast array of possibilities for the exploration of artificial intelligence solutions, all of which could disrupt the industry (and our teaching and research) even more. The potential opened by the way in which new realities like image recognition, immersive environments or augmented reality can intertwine with the various AVT localisation practices and access services has been barely broached so far.

ŁB: And how has the academic world been coping with such a panoply of changes?

Fortunately for us, commercial success and technological enquiry have come hand in hand with academic ascendancy, as evidenced by the vast amount of publications that have seen the light in recent years, the many events that have been organised, the multiple doctoral theses that have been defended, and the numerous educational programmes focused on AVT that are part of the curricular offerings at many universities around the world. We recently witnessed, in 2018, the launch of the *Journal of Audiovisual Translation* (JAT), the first academic journal ever to be entirely specialised in our area. Yet, the drive has come mainly from some Western countries and scholars and, my contention is that we all need to do more to avoid a situation in which the debate becomes too English-focused and Eurocentric. To guarantee the healthy and sustainable development of AVT we must not only open up and embrace but also actively promote the visibility of other languages and national practices. In this respect, for instance, initiatives such as the launch of the Audiovisual Translation and Dissemination (AVTD) committee, set up by State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and China Alliance of Radio, Film and Television to enhance research and best practices in AVT and to improve media accessibility in China, can only be seen as one of the steps in the right direction.

From a training perspective, for instance, a collateral result from the fast growing global demand for content that needs to be localised in the entertainment industry is the perceived critical "talent crunch" (Estopace 2017) or shortage of qualified professional subtitlers and dubbing translators in the industry. Given the dearth of formal AVT training in many countries, the situation is likely to worsen in the short term, especially in the case of certain language combinations. What is certain, however, is that the demand for AVT is here to stay, as media networks and organisations around the world continue to recognise the immense value of localising their content into multiple languages if they are to extend their global reach, which in turn triggers the need for teaching AVT in a dedicated and specialist manner and in language combinations that have not been exploited thus far.

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In addition to all this, and when compared with other fields of specialisation in translation, there is an absence of any robust accreditation processes in AVT, or databases for qualified practitioners, or standard registration through a professional body, which could capture the total number of expert media translators worldwide and that could also help uphold minimum quality standards. Netflix's attempt to plug this gap with the introduction of their Hermes test, and despite its subsequent disconnection, was partially successful insofar as it galvanised the interest of stakeholders on the topic, though it has to be agreed that more efforts need to be channelled into such an initiative for it to be truly effective in the industry.

On the upside, the attraction exerted by AVT in the classroom is evinced in the strong number of students wanting to enrol in courses that deal with the translation of audiovisual materials. They are invariably some of the most popular modules in the curriculum and guarantee that there will be an infused supply of new professional and academic talent in the years to come.

ŁB: What can you tell us about amateur subtitling?

This is a topic that, under different headings, has been widely discussed in the literature (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006, Pérez González 2007, Massidda 2015, Dwyer 2017). The so-called democratisation of technology has facilitated not only decentralisation of the traditional circulation of audiovisual media that was dependent on corporate strategies but also the activation of new ways of distribution that rely primarily on tactics of grassroots appropriation. Along with the multiplication of videos, the offer of subtitles on the net, whether solicited or unsolicited, has also boomed in recent decades. Fansubbing, the act of subtitling 'by fans for fans', is credited with having been the first instantiation of such an approach back in the 1980s with the subtitling of Japanese anime, though it was not until the 1990s, with the advent of cheap computer software and the availability of free subtitling equipment, that they really took off.

Activity on this front has mushroomed in recent decades and the boundaries among the many types of subtitles are not always clear cut, making their classification a terminological conundrum. Although 'amateur' subtitling is a sufficiently broad concept that has been frequently used in academic exchanges, the reality is that not all individuals are dilettantes and some of them are professionals. 'Volunteer', 'non-professional', 'collaborative', 'errand', 'honest', 'crowdsubtitles', 'fansubs' and 'funsubs' are also notions articulated when referring to these online practices, all of them bringing in different nuances. Elsewhere, I have delved into this topic and proposed an encompassing concept that, in my opinion, subsumes the myriad subtitles encountered on the net: 'cybersubtitles' (Díaz-Cintas 2018). These can be purposely requested by some collectives, i.e. crowdsourced, or generated on a voluntary basis, and the individuals behind their production can be either amateurs or professionals. Within the core category of cybersubtitles, three main types of subtitles can be found: (1) 'fansubs', which I have just briefly explained; (2) 'guerrilla subtitles', that are produced by individuals or collectives engaged in political causes, as in the case of the online group Spanish (R)evolution (www.facebook.com/pg/SpanishRevolution/videos); and (3) 'altruist subtitles', usually commissioned and undertaken by individuals with a close affinity to a project, e.g. Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org).

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With the increasing circulation of audiovisual productions on the internet, the pervasive role of social networks in today's communication and the growing socio-political awareness of certain sectors of the population, there is no doubt that cybersubtitling is here to stay and to continue to grow.

ŁB: You have written extensively about the didactics of AVT. How has the teaching and learning of (audiovisual) translation evolved over the years?

I started teaching general translation to undergraduate students in the early 1990s at Roehampton University, in London, and by the end of that decade I was already teaching subtitling. Back then, the notion of translation, and how it had to be taught, was markedly different from what it is now. The focus was on the written word, students could not use dictionaries or reference books during the exams, never mind be granted access to the internet, and a great deal of importance was placed on memorising vocabulary and syntactical structures. On the whole, the approach was markedly philological rather than traductological. I, for one, am delighted to see that this way of teaching translation is becoming a thing of the past and that current methods are much more dynamic and professionally oriented.

Working with audiovisual material was very challenging as universities did not normally have access to specialist software and we had to make do with VHS tapes, TV sets and overhead projectors. In a couple of decades, technology has radically transformed the educational ecosystem for many of us, albeit not all. The digitisation of the images, the educational packages offered by some software developers, the availability of subtitling freeware, and the more recent advent of cloud-based subtitling platforms have all radically altered the teaching and learning experience. In principle, it is much simpler for lecturers to mimic professional practices in the classroom than it has ever been and this can only have a positive impact in the future employability of our students. The challenge, though, is to be able to somehow guarantee that AVT lecturers keep up to date with new technologies and are willing to embed them in the classroom.

Additionally, the profile of our students has changed and today's digital native learners are not only more tech-savvy than previous cohorts, but also more attracted by videos than they are by books and other written outputs, which partly justifies the success of modules on AVT, film studies, digital media and the like but it also forces us to adapt our teaching methods to the expectations of the new generations.

ŁB: And how do you see it developing into the future?

Scholarly endeavours have been, and will continue to be, crucial in order to fine-tune and improve the teaching of a particular discipline to would-be professionals and ultimately guarantee its sustainability into the future. To prepare the professionals of the future with the right skills, forward-looking modules need to be designed and developed now, taking into account the linguacultural dimension as well as the technological possibilities and the market reality. To make sure that students are qualified to be able to functionally operate in the

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future, their instrumental knowledge should be honed by being exposed to the latest advances in the industry, including up-to-date technologies and translation workflows.

It is essential that the long-standing gap between the AVT industry and academia be bridged, so that the latter can benefit from learning about the current and future needs of the former, and the industry can recruit employees with the right skills. Indeed, collaboration between trainers and the industry, not only language vendors but also, and crucially, technology developers, has been traditionally minimal and this trend has to be reversed. If, say, tutors do not have access to cloud-based subtitling or dubbing platforms, how can they then train their students proficiently to meet the needs of the market? A more advantageous relationship must be explored among the interested parties, whereby trainers can be granted wider access to cutting-edge professional tools and platforms for their own interest and technical preparation. Synergies of this nature can help scholars to conduct self-reflective assessments of the curriculum on offer at their own institutions and instigate the necessary innovative and transformational changes that will secure the wellbeing of the discipline in the years to come. Also, opportunities of this calibre could be utilised from a research perspective to conduct user experience tests among practitioners and translators-to-be not only to inform future training but also in exchange for advice on potential improvements of those tools, so that the benefits are reciprocal.

ŁB: In 1972, James S. Holmes proposed his seminal map of translation studies. Almost half a century into the development of the discipline, do you think that a new map needs to be drawn, incorporating audiovisual translation and possibly media accessibility?

Holmes's (2004/1988) map has certainly had a great impact on the discipline and, in my view, such influence derives from its simple, schematic representation of a rather complex area of knowledge. Other authors, like Munday (2008/2001), have worked on it and expanded the applied branch of Translation Studies, always looking at translation from a wide perspective rather than a specialised one. When it comes to AVT, Di Giovanni and Gambier (2018), inspired by Holmes's proposal, have come up with a map that tries to show the development of AVT over the last three decades, paying special attention to the research dimension. I guess these derivative activities do nothing but confirm the validity of the original map, which keeps stimulating other translation researchers and is flexible enough to accommodate new potentialities.

Although it is true that in its conceptual inception the map might have been designed with the translation of traditional, written texts in mind, the reality is that it can effortlessly account for any other textual genres. Personally, I would find it challenging, and to a large extent unnecessary, to devise a new map that will be only specific to AVT and media accessibility. If anything, one of the beauties of the existing map is precisely the fact that it can easily house the various audiovisual translation practices in existence and it is also sufficiently elastic to allow for the addition of new categories, if need be. Perhaps, the way forward could be to test that, indeed, all the different labels contained in the map do actually apply in the case of AVT, including practices like sign language interpreting (SLI), SDH and AD.

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ŁB: Now that you mention it, where does media accessibility fit in all this?

As far as I can remember, it was during one of the early editions of the *Languages & the Media* series of conferences, which has been taking place in Berlin since 1996, that one of the participants, hard-of-hearing himself, raised the issue in one of the main roundtables as to whether subtitling for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences was indeed a topic that fitted within the remit of the conference, as nobody had touched upon it on any of the presentations. And, for that matter, audio description had been equally absent from the discussions. Though many of us were aware of these professional practices, what stroke me at the time was the fact that their existence in the industry was not necessarily mirrored in academia. Indeed, very little research had been carried out in the area of media accessibility in general and virtually no studies had been conducted in these topics from a translational perspective, the first rigorous works not appearing until the mid-2000s. The territory was pretty much uncharted and some colleagues saw it as a great opportunity to revitalise and advance their scholarly pursuits.

Unlike SLI, where a change of language takes place in the communicative act, siting these other access servicers within translation studies used to be a tricky endeavour a few decades ago as none of them requires the knowledge of any foreign language and, being intralingual practices, some universities were reluctant to incorporate them into their 'traditionally' interlingual translation curricula. I am glad to say that we have come a long way since then and accessibility has become a major, booming topic of interest both in the translation curriculum and in research. Now, the question still remains of why topics like SDH and AD are not studied as a constituent part of other areas of knowledge like media studies, creative writing, disable studies or museum studies, to name but a few. For instance, the latter could very easily accommodate modules on the audio description of museum exhibits or classical paintings but, to the best of my knowledge, they do not.

As I have just discussed, media accessibility has been considered an integral part of AVT by many of us but given its vertiginous evolution in the last two decades and its greater visibility in academic exchanges some scholars are now foregrounding the specific characteristics of these practices and claiming that "[t]he ubiquitous effects of accessibility have led to the emergence of a new research field, namely *accessibility studies* (AS)" (Greco 2018: online). I prefer to adopt a more conciliatory stand and a wider view on accessibility and, elsewhere (Díaz Cintas 2005), I have defined the concept as making audiovisual programmes available to people that otherwise could not have access to them, irrespective of whether the barriers are sensory or linguistic. Such conceptualisation of the term 'media accessibility' encompasses both traditional interlingual types of AVT like dubbing, voiceover or subtitling, and more typical media access services such as SDH or AD. Whether the communication is impeded by a language or a sensory barrier, the ultimate aim of these practices is identical, i.e. to facilitate access to an otherwise hermetic source of information and entertainment. Under this prism, interlingual types of AVT are seen from the broader perspective of media accessibility and accessibility itself becomes a common denominator that underpins these practices.

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ŁB: An issue of concern in Translation Studies is the divide between theory and practice, with some academics doing research with their back to the industry and practitioners and other professionals not being sufficiently involved with academic developments. From the standpoint of AVT, what is your take on this?

The divide between theory and practice seems to be a sempiternal one, not only in translation but also in other walks of life. From the professionals' perspective, especially if they are freelancers, it is very challenging to be actively involved in academic life as the time spent writing an article, attending a conference or giving a talk has a direct impact on their potential to earn money, and some of these activities can also be onerous on their finances. The topics of interest can also vary substantially and while research with an applied dimension tends to be preferred by colleagues in the industry, still is the case that the output of some academics is perceived as being too theoretical and far removed from professional practice, if not frontally contradictory. This approach to investigation is also perfectly understandable, particularly in educational settings in which academics are regularly assessed on their published research work and in which the criteria that regulates the quality of those publications tends to favour theoretical over applied topics. In addition, and unlike the standard practice in Pure Sciences and Social Sciences, co-writing articles in our discipline is usually treated with suspicion by the powers that be, which obviously does not incentivise collaboration.

Of course, beyond these pragmatic factors lies a philosophical debate on what the nature of research should be, particularly in the humanities. Should it focus on theoretical conceptualisations of knowledge? Should it take a more applied slant and make sure that its results are relevant to the wider society and have a direct impact on its members? As always, the solution might well be a happy balance between the two extremes of the cline.

Having said that, it is most encouraging to see the consolidation of international spaces for dialogue, such as the recurring *Languages & the Media, Media for All* and *Intermedia* conferences, where all interested parties and stakeholders can come together to discuss new developments, network and strengthen collaboration. Since their inception, events like these have worked hard to project an encompassing image and provide a welcoming environment for academics, practitioners, trainees, language service providers, clients, associations and software developers to conduct fruitful debate. The many research projects in AVT that are being carried out these days is another positive sign of the collaborative links that have been increasingly forged between academic and industry partners. In this sense, translation in general, and AVT in particular, seem to be well placed when it comes to adjusting to new changes in research ecosystems and traditions. Beyond theorising about the challenges encountered when translating humour, taboo language or cultural references, it is not difficult for AVT to engage with applied topics, that are technologically driven and have a direct and measurable impact on the lives of its users, be them sensory impaired or linguistically challenged.

ŁB: What is the impact on training?

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Naturally, this varies greatly from university to university, particularly in this period of financial austerity, as some of them have relatively easy recourse to financial means to pay for the technology and to recruit trainers with the right expertise and language combinations while others struggle. Another issue foregrounded by some colleagues is the apparent sharp dissimilitude that exists between the professional backgrounds of academics and practising translators and the implications that this has from a pedagogical perspective, as reflected in this quote from Englund-Dimitrova (2002: 74):

> University teachers are sometimes too theoretical and do not always have the necessary knowledge about the future professional reality of the students; the professional translators, on the other hand, sometimes tend to be too practical, lacking the theoretical background which the students themselves have and consequently also expect from their teachers.

Generally speaking, there is a perceived mismatch between real professional practice and what is taught in the classroom, and this can be expressly problematic in a field like AVT, which is highly technology-driven, tightly dependent on continuous software updates, and whose market ecosystem is constantly being transformed and reconfigured so as to address the consumption and viewing habits of an ever-changing audience.

The high financial investment required to source the appropriate commercial tools has been traditionally blamed for their absence in the classroom, and has justified the theoretical perspective adopted in many modules. The situation, however, has been mitigated to a large extent with the availability of dedicated freeware, which is available to anyone and allows the trainers and trainees to simulate some of the most common tasks in the industry. Finding instructors with the right pedagogical experience and professional expertise to teach highly specialised modules has also been, and will continue to be, an exacting pursuit. On the bright side, the number of AVT specialists operating in the market, and willing to teach a few hours alongside their other duties, has vastly increased in line with the explosion in the volume of AVT, making this search less daunting.

Because of its eminently applied nature, the third pillar on which AVT training should rest is collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders, particularly clients, language service providers, professional translators, dedicated AVT associations and, perhaps to a lesser extent, technology developers. Educational centres are realising this is not only good practice but also peremptory for the good health of their curricula and many are now establishing fruitful links with professional partners, with the aim of licensing appropriate specialist software and also increasing internship opportunities, organising workshops and company visits, and promoting real-life professional experiences to which translators-to-be and members of staff can be exposed.

ŁB: How has audiovisual translation been researched?

Early systematic research in our field, from the mid-1990s, embraced descriptivism because that was the time when Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) was the theoretical paradigm en vogue. DTS's premises and postulates were also most fitting as they rejected prescriptivism outright and encouraged explorations whose ultimate aim was to dissect the object of study

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and map out the norms that were prevalent in the translation of audiovisual programmes. As, in that period, we did not know much about the sociolinguistic and professional intricacies of this practice, some of these studies were seminal insomuch as they provided us with a detailed radiography of the various translation modes while contributing to the recognition of AVT as a deserving research area.

The search for specific features that could justify the autonomy of AVT as a distinct branch from other translation activities was one of the main propellers in the early investigations and publications adhering to traditional approaches with applied linguistics at their core have been numerous, particularly in the form of case studies where the translation of humour, swearing, cultural references and wordplay, to name but a few, have been duly investigated. More recently, topics like multilingualism, fansubbing/fandubbing, ideology and activism seem to be attracting the attention of researchers. Other theoretical frameworks beyond descriptivism have also proved operative and fruitful in the investigation of the various AVT modes, such as action research (Neves 2004), relevance theory (Bogucki 2004, Pai 2017), multimodal analysis (Taylor 2013) and actor network theory (Eardley-Weaver 2014, Williamson 2015). For scholars like Chaume (2018), the way in which research has evolved in AVT can be schematised in four sequential turns, – i.e. descriptive, cultural, sociological and cognitive –, which is a neat attempt to provide a synoptic overview of our academic efforts across the years.

ŁB: And how do you see it evolving into the future?

It has been widely acknowledged for some time now that the way forward for our discipline has to be found in its interdisciplinarity and potential synergies with other branches of knowledge, especially within the humanities. For many years, scholars like Chaume (2004) and, more recently, Romero-Fresco (2019), have advocated closer interaction with film studies and filmmakers, and the works of De Marco (2012) have benefit from the theoretical apparatus borrowed from gender studies in order to shed light on how the language used in the translated dialogue lines affects or is affected by social constructs such as gender, class and race. Similarly, premises and conceptualisations from postcolonial studies have proved highly operative in disentangling the role played by multilingualism in diasporic films (Beseghi 2017).

To my mind, this attachment to the arts and humanities derives from the traditional close connections that translation has shared with disciplines like linguistics, languages, philology and comparative literature. A conceptualisation of this nature makes it rather challenging for academics, and sometimes even risky, to adhere to certain methodologies, perhaps more attune to the social sciences, in detriment of some others with more currency in the humanities. Yet, I would like to argue that methods and approaches typical of the social sciences may well yield better dividends in the case of AVT, and particularly accessibility.

The belief that makers, as opposed to users, know best has been a dominant adage in AVT that assigns more prominence to the views of policymakers, professionals, researchers and other stakeholders in the industry than to those of the end users. In recent years, however, this approach has started to be challenged and more kudos is being granted to viewers. A

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relatively new trend in AVT research, which is likely to endure in the future, encourages shifting the attention from the textual niceties of the original production to the potential effects that the ensuing translation has on viewers. Traditionally, reception studies have been avoided in AVT as they were considered to be too complex in their implementation, costly and lengthy. Furthermore, the right technology to conduct experimental research was not readily available and the expertise was lacking on the part of the pioneering AVT researchers. Yet, there seems to be a growing consensus nowadays that reception studies are important for the sustainability of the discipline and for the strengthening of links between the industry and academia; a cooperation that in turn holds promise for the development and provision of better products for end users. In this sense, the media industry is interested in knowing how viewers around the world enjoy their subtitled and respoken audiovisual productions; technology companies working in the development of state-of-the-art software for AVT can also benefit from the results yielded by experimental research with professionals; and language service providers can profit from the insights gained through reception research, which can help them to adapt their practices to new workflows, to update their style guides or to reconsider some of the traditionally accepted spatial and temporal considerations that have marked the translation and delivery of their audiovisual programmes.

This is why some scholars are increasingly willing to rely on technology and statistical analysis to interrogate the data under scrutiny. As two relatively dormant and ignored areas in AVT, reception studies and cognitive processes, have become pivotal in recent academic exchanges. Researchers are no longer content with describing a given state of affairs or taking for granted certain inherited premises that have been perpetuated in the available literature. Rather, by exploiting psychometric methodologies and by embracing technologies and statistical data analysis tools available to them, they are eager to carry out experimental research to unravel the cognitive effort implicit in the translational process or to describe the effects that AVT practices have on the various heterogeneous groups that make up the audience, on translators-to-be and on professionals already working in the field. Of particular note is the application of physiological instruments such as eye trackers, which are common currency in research fields like advertising and medical sciences, to the experimental investigation of AVT, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the users' cognitive processes while watching an audiovisual programme (Perego, 2012).

In addition to the benefits of eye tracking, potential still exists to make full use of other biometric instruments that can help elucidate the reaction of the audience, such as galvanic skin response devices to measure participants' levels of arousal, and webcams to record and conduct facial expression analysis. Electroencephalography (EEG) and electrocardiograms (ECG) also open up a wealth of possibilities. EEG is a neuroimaging technique that helps to assess brain activity associated with perception, cognitive behaviour and emotional processes by foregrounding the parts of the brain that are active while participants perform a task or are exposed to certain stimulus material. ECG, on the other hand, monitors heart activity in an attempt to track respondents' physical state, their anxiety and stress levels, which in turn can provide helpful insights into cognitive-affective processes.

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Another research domain that has piqued scholars' ingenuity in recent years, and I guess will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, is the didactic potential offered by the various AVT modes when it comes to foreign language teaching and learning (Incalcaterra McLoughlin et al. 2011, Gambier et al. 2015). In addition to a handsome number of publications having seen the light, the topic has been a fertile one in collaborative initiatives, with international projects like ClipFlair (Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Revoicing & Captioning of Clips, http://clipflair.net) and PluriTAV (Audiovisual Translation as a Tool for the Development of Multilingual Competences in the Classroom, http://citrans.uv.es/pluritav/?lang=en).

ŁB: In your opinion, what areas will develop in the near future?

Areas like accessibility to the media, cybersubtitling and reception studies will continue to be trending topics in our discipline but if I had to name three buzzwords or expressions that will shape the future, then I would go for user generated content, revoicing and technology.

Without a shred of a doubt, video activity on the net via social media and the upsurge of user-generated content in platforms like YouTube or Bilibili will continue to shape and pervade the way in which we communicate. It would not surprise me if the likes of YouTubers and influencers, some of whom command millions of followers on the internet and gain their revenue from the number of visitors that click on their ads (Geyser 2019), were to discover the power of subtitling and revoicing to help them multiply those clicks.

Revoicing, in the form of dubbing and voiceover, is already experiencing an unprecedented quantitative boom and will continue to do so, particularly in the world of streaming and video on demand. This development is going to go hand-in-hand with the destabilisation of English as the language par excellence in media entertainment and the renaissance of other original languages, as intimated by players like Netflix, which has admitted that English is not going to be its primary viewing language for much longer (Rodríguez 2017) and has already embarked on the ambitious production of internationally acclaimed shows shot in other languages, like the Spanish *La casa de papel* (*Money Heist*, Álex Pina, 2017–), the German *Dark* (Baran bo Odar, Jantje Friese, 2017–) or the Danish *The Rain* (Jannik Tai Mosholt, Christian Potalivo and Esben Toft Jacobsen, 2018–).

Finally, and rather unsurprisingly, technology is bound to remain the main catalyst behind some of the future developments and we will be well advised to keep an eye open for any disruptions caused by cloud technology, automatic speech recognition in its multiple instantiations (speech synthesis, text-to-speech, speech-to-text or speech-to-speech), blockchain solutions, immersive environments and artificial intelligence.

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